

Birds are Amazing Builders

Birds need nests to protect their eggs and their young birds from predators, as well as from harmful temperatures and weather conditions. In many cases, birds try to make their nests difficult for predators to see or to reach. "Bird nests range from non-existent to extensive, multi-chambered apartments which can be fully weatherproof and may last for years or even decades"

(<http://www.earthlife.net/birds/nests.html>). Bird nests may be shaped like a cup, a platform, a hanging elongated sac, or a suspended sphere. Other birds scrape natural materials together into a ground nest, bury eggs in mounds, build nests by burrowing into the ground, or utilize an existing cavity in a tree. "The smallest bird nests are those of some hummingbirds, tiny cups which can be a mere 2 cm (0.79 in) across and 2–3 cm (0.79–1.2 in) high. At the other extreme, some nest mounds built by the Dusky Scrubfowl measure more than 11 m (36 ft) in diameter and stand nearly 5 m (16 ft) tall" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bird_nest).



Like human builders, birds must choose their construction materials from readily available resources and then combine them with attention to both functionality and stability. Their sense of aesthetics is amazing, and the nests are often well camouflaged. During the January units on Building, when children are thinking about strategies for building stable structures with varied materials, help them consider the challenges birds face when making the nests that you see in your neighborhoods. When we study Birds & Flight in February, we've scheduled several Family Social Organization outings to the Pittsburgh Aviary, so you can continue the discussion of nest building together at that time.



See "15 incredible photographs of birds' nests" at <http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/news-15-incredible-photographs-birds-nests>.